

(Draft – Awaiting Approval)  
**MINUTES OF THE  
VETERANS' AND MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION**  
Wednesday, August 3, 2016 – 2:00 p.m. – Room 30 House Building

**Members Present:**

Sen. Peter C. Knudson, Senate Chair  
Rep. Paul Ray, House Chair  
Rep. Marie H. Poulson  
Dr. Steven Allen  
Mr. Zachary Barrus  
Major General Jefferson S. Burton  
Ms. Jackie L. Chamberlain  
Mr. Tim M. Cosgrove  
Mr. Bart Davis  
Mr. Brian Garrett  
Mr. George Gutzmer  
Mr. Gary Harter  
Mr. Paul Patrick  
Mr. Jon Pierpont  
Mr. Kraig Thorne

**Members Absent:**

Sen. Karen Mayne  
Rep. Val L. Peterson  
Dr. Blair K. Carruth  
Mr. Tage I. Flint  
Mr. Frank Maughan  
Mr. Greg Rowley  
Mr. Terry D. Schow

**Staff Present:**

Mr. Gregg A. Girvan, Policy Analyst  
Mr. Arthur L. Hunsaker, Policy Analyst  
Ms. Esther Chelsea-McCarty, Associate General Counsel  
Ms. Tracey Fredman, Legislative Assistant

**Note:** A list of others present, a copy of related materials, and an audio recording of the meeting can be found at [www.le.utah.gov](http://www.le.utah.gov).

**1. Committee Business**

Chair Ray called the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m. Sen. Mayne, Rep. Peterson, Mr. Carruth, Mr. Maughan, Mr. Rowley, and Mr. Schow were excused from the meeting.

**MOTION:** Sen. Knudson moved to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2016, meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Cosgrove was absent for the vote.

**2. Veterans Administration Reform**

Congressman Chris Stewart, representing Utah's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, highlighted two issues that are currently being addressed by Congress, which are accessibility of services to veterans and the lack of accountability on the part of medical service providers. Congressman Stewart indicated that there will be new legislation next year to provide more specific direction to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs on how to implement the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014.

Commission discussion followed and Congressman Stewart responded to concerns about the following issues:

- Manpower to provide needed services;
- Availability of services for female veterans;
- Accountability of service providers in the Veterans Affairs (VA) system;
- Reimbursement of medical providers through the Choice program;
- Veterans' credit issues related to the Choice program; and
- Dissemination of information to veterans about availability of services.

### **3. Veterans Administration: CHOICE Program**

Prior to the presentation, Chair Ray called commission members' attention to "Veterans' and Military Affairs Commission Revised Meeting Schedule for the Remainder of 2016," which was distributed by commission staff.

Mr. Girvan presented "Veterans Healthcare in the Community, The CHOICE Program." During the presentation he briefed the commission about the purpose of the Choice program, the impact of the program on veterans' access to care, and alternative reforms for consideration.

Ms. Nena Saunders, Associate Director, George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, indicated that the Choice program has not worked out well for veterans. However, she reported that the VA has another option that has been working well. She discussed preferred provider agreements that are used in urgent situations when the Choice program cannot meet a veteran's needs within 48-hours. Ms. Saunders explained that those cases are given to the VA, and the VA pays for care received by a local preferred provider in the program. She indicated that in addition to 205 preferred providers in the program, IHC has now entered into an agreement to provide services. Further, she indicated that if the situation is not urgent, the Choice program has five days to set up an appointment for a veteran. If the Choice program cannot do it, the veteran is sent to the VA for services. Ms. Saunders also stated that about 70 percent of veterans choose to wait for services through the VA because of the high quality of care they receive.

Mr. Christopher Scott, Legislative Liaison, Veterans Administration Regional Office, discussed the outreach to veterans and reasons veterans don't use the Choice program. He also provided contact information for veterans who need help finding services to address their individual needs.

### **4. Draft bill, "Veterans' and Military Affairs Commission Amendments"**

Chair Ray referred commission members to draft legislation, "Veterans' and Military Affairs Commission Amendments" (2017FL-0022/002), which was distributed in the mailing packet. He explained that the legislation provides for a representative of the Veterans Administration to be appointed to the membership of the commission so that the term of participation by the Veterans Administration will not conclude at the end of a term.

**MOTION:** Mr. Harter moved to recommend draft legislation, "Veterans' and Military Affairs Commission Amendments" as presented.

Ms. Chelsea-McCarty indicated that an amendment needs to be made to Line 30 of the draft to change "23" to "24".

Mr. Harter accepted the amendment to the bill and incorporated it into the motion.

Chair Ray called for a vote on the motion, which passed unanimously. Mr. Cosgrove was absent for the vote.

### **5. Draft bill, "Interstate Compact on Military Children Amendments"**

Ms. Chelsea-McCarty distributed an excerpt from "Title 53A State System of Public Education" and highlighted the single change being made to the interstate compact through draft legislation "Interstate Compact on Military Children Amendments" (2017FL-0308/003), which was distributed in the mailing packet.

Mr. Garrett updated commission members on the issue.

**MOTION:** Mr. Garrett moved to recommend draft legislation "Interstate Compact on Military Children Amendments." The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Cosgrove was absent for the vote.

**6. Other Business/Adjourn**

Mr. Harter distributed "Military Appreciation Day" and commented on the events taking place around the state on August 13, 2016. He also discussed progress on a VA medical center in Ogden.

**MOTION:** Sen. Knudson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Cosgrove was absent for the vote.

Chair Ray adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.